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Pratt, Hodgson

A new industrial world

London

[1893]

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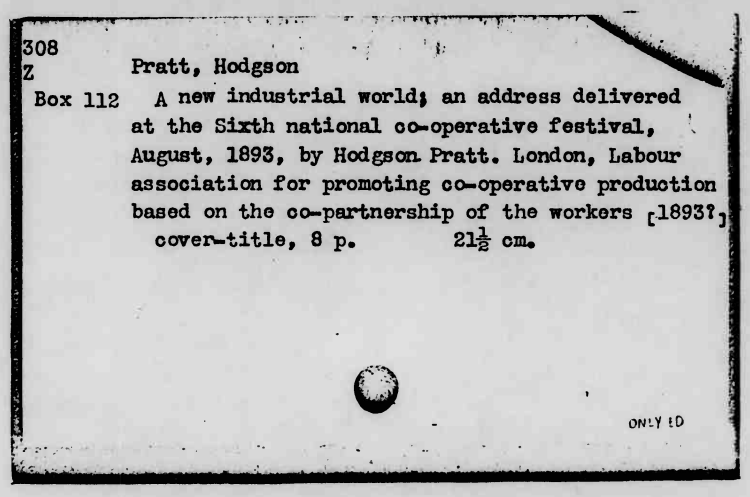
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C. V. GERRITSEN
AMSTERDAM.

A NEW INDUSTRIAL WORLD.

AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED AT THE

SIXTH NATIONAL CO-OPERATIVE FESTIVAL,

AUGUST, 1893,

BY

HODGSON PRATT.

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THE LABOUR ASSOCIATION

FOR PROMOTING

Co-operative Production based on the Co-partnership of the Workers.

Central Office—

9, JOHN STREET, ADELPHI, LONDON, W.C.

PRICE ONE PENNY.

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THE LABOUR ASSOCIATION'S OBJECTS ARE

To advocate Co-operative Production upon the basis of the workers sharing in the management and the results of their industry.

To enlist the active interest of the Trade Union movement in the Co-operative Productive movement, in order to secure their united action for mutual benefit and progress.

To disseminate knowledge on the position of Co-operative Workshops and the condition of the workers, and assist them to organise for mutual self-employment by the following means :—

The publication and supply of Literature.

The delivery of Lectures, Addresses, &c.

The holding of Conferences of all classes of persons interested in the improvement of industrial conditions.

The bringing before Trades Unionists and the public the importance of their using, whenever possible, the goods made by Productive Societies, based upon our principle, in workshops where Trade Union conditions of labour prevail.

The holding of Exhibitions of Co-operative Products in the large centres of industry in order to show the excellence and increasing variety of goods made by our Societies under fair conditions, and thus to help in securing a market for young Societies.

In order to advance the objects of the Association, the Committee desire the assistance of friends in London and the provinces : (1) By organising Meetings, Lectures, Conferences, Distribution of Literature amongst the Societies, Trade Unions, or Associations with which they may be connected ; (2) By supplying the Committee with any information concerning the starting or position of any Co-operative Productive Societies in their district ; (3) By becoming subscribers to the Association's funds of any sum not less than one shilling per annum.

ADDRESS.

EVERY good citizen, nay, every member of the human family, is bound to consider the following question :—"Does the existing condition of the people in the community where he lives accord with a just and true ideal of human society?" "Is its organisation such as to secure the greatest possible happiness of the greatest number?" "Would some Spirit, coming from a more perfect world, find that all the members of the community possessed a fair share of the best results of a true and noble civilisation?"

None of us, I think, can reply to these questions in the affirmative. If we look at the condition of the majority of our fellows, we shall find cause for the wide-spread dissatisfaction—if not fierce discontent—of which there is evidence on every hand

We know too well that the Majority are not in the enjoyment of all that constitutes a full and happy existence. The hewers of coal, the furnace men, the stokers and engine drivers, seafaring men who transport the world's wealth from land to land, the toilers exposed to dangers of every kind, during the long hours of every day, from youth to age—with fluctuating and inadequate means of existence—are not and cannot be satisfied with the present order of things. After all these generations of experiment and of legislation, there is still no certainty for the majority of our brethren, that when old age and weakness come, there shall be food in plenty, with some little comfort and solace, as their reward.

Such facts, indeed, constitute a grave indictment against us all,—against all, at least who care not for these things, and do nothing to bring about the rule of Justice and Humanity on the earth. Let us welcome then, with all our hearts, those who seek, by any wise means whatever, to inaugurate social reform. To-day a Festival has been held to make more widely known a great step in that direction ; one which is no longer a mere experiment. Its root idea may perhaps be stated thus : The security, the progress, and the well-being of every community are based on Labour. Intelligent, wise and organised Labour constitutes all the difference between the condition of man, in a savage, as compared with a civilised state. Without the labour of hand and brain, during all the past times, inspired by ever new discoveries and thoughts, nothing of all that surrounds us would be here. These splendid buildings, and the wonderful objects which they contain ; the railways which brought you here ; this brilliant light which makes the darkness day ; the music which soothes and elevates our spirits ; and, above all, the security in which we enjoy all this,—all is due to the toil of those who have gone before us, or are living now.

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If Industry, then, is the basis of all the comfort—material enjoyment and intellectual advantages which we inherit, and which we desire to increase—then one of the greatest considerations for us all is this: "Under what conditions is Industry conducted? and under what conditions OUGHT IT TO BE CONDUCTED?"

This problem should ever be present to our minds, if we have the most elementary notion of duty to mankind.

Accordingly, if we meet with any persons who offer a remedy for the enormous and shameful evils which we deplore, we must give them our best attention, and this is what they say: "For the last forty or fifty years we have thought out and worked out certain definite plans for a new constitution of the Industrial World." This school of social reformers have called their principles by the name of "CO-OPERATION," and some of our wisest statemen, economists, and thinkers are empathic in their approval of the remedy proposed. These reliable and experienced men—not in England only, but in other countries also—declare that the method in question is as practicable as it is true in theory. Indeed, a vast number of the most intelligent members of the working-men of Great Britain have applied and carried out Co-operative methods with marvellous success.

Twenty years ago, this reform had made sufficient progress to justify the creation of a Union of all the Co-operative Societies—some hundred in number; consisting of six Sections, corresponding with six great divisions of country in Scotland and England. It took, as its basis of teaching and practice, this principle: That all men engaged in industry should not be rivals, but fellow-workers, and that Justice should regulate the dealings between them. In a word, Co-operation was declared to have two chief aims, one moral, and the other economic. Truth and Justice on the one hand, the Prevention of Waste on the other hand. The great practical change demanded by this Co-operative Union is that the workers should be their own masters and their own employers, each of them receiving an equitable share of the proceeds of his labour, and each having his fitting share in the direction and management of the joint undertaking. Thus would all find in their labour a new hope, a new interest, and a new security which would transform their daily lives.

How was this great transformation to be effected? How should the millions of artizans and labourers, hitherto living from hand to mouth, find capital, organising and directing power, technical knowledge, and an adequate market for their productions? To meet these necessary conditions of success, the great power of "association" was applied in the first instance to supply the workers' need of the daily necessaries of life. As everyone knows, or ought to know, the first step was taken at Rochdale in 1842, when twenty-eight flannel weavers set a great example to the world. They scraped together a capital of twenty-eight pounds, held in shares; and with that fund

they bought their groceries, their flour and coals at wholesale prices, sold them at ordinary retail price to the members, and divided the profit so made, in proportion to each man's purchases. Thus was born that fruitful idea of Distributive Co-operation which has gone on ever since, until now, at the present time, there are one million and a quarter heads of families belonging to these Societies, having a capital, in pound shares, of fifteen millions, with an annual trade of fifty millions; and dividing five millions a year in profits. Rightly, indeed, has a distinguished Professor of political economy at Cambridge (Prof. Alfred Marshall) declared that Co-operation is "the typical and most representative product of the age, because it combines high aspirations with calm and strenuous action." He adds that "no other country has anything to compare with our great distributing and wholesale Co-operative Societies." With equal truth has Lord Rosebery said, that their wonderful organisation constitutes "a State within a State;" and the late Lord Derby declared that Co-operation was "the best, the surest remedy for the alleged antagonism of Labour and Capital." To which testimony, our Prime Minister adds his, saying, "There has not been a better thing done in this country than the establishment of Co-operation."

The moral and material advantages of this organised system of Distribution should indeed be patent to all the world. The worker, finding it almost impossible, previously, to save, has been able to do so without effort, because every shilling of his expenditure at his Store brings him profits which accumulate to his credit. It would not be an exaggeration to say that tens of thousands of men, who never before could put by a sovereign, have accumulated sums of money which amount in the aggregate to millions; and have been enabled, out of those savings, to purchase their own dwellings, and obtain many comforts otherwise wholly out of reach. On the other hand, the articles of food and clothing, which the Co-operator purchases are honest, and worth the money; and he has not been robbed by the infamy of adulteration and falsehood. His mental powers have been developed by the responsibility of management, and his moral nature by the inspiring sense of confraternity, by the sentiment that whilst he was benefiting himself and his family, he was benefiting his brethren also. I deliberately say that the moral influence of this practical brotherhood may be seen in the personal aspect, manner and conversation of these men. Their lives have been illuminated by a great idea, which has diminished selfishness and increased nobility of thought and character.

Great as are the results of this form of association, these do not constitute the highest and ultimate aim of the Rochdale Pioneers. It is not enough that by association men should be enabled to make their earning go further, and even accumulate savings to ensure comfort and competence. That great power may come and much higher results.

A far larger question remains unsolved, but not forgotten. This is, whether it is not possible, by the organisation of Labour, to secure for the labourer not merely living-wages, but the profits derived from Labour when united to his own Capital. Whether it is not possible for him in fact to become his own employer and his own master. Can he not produce on his own account, and that of his fellows, all the articles which he had hitherto bought from others? Can he not realise those greater aims which he has in common with the Socialists, and obtain "the ownership of the instruments of Production?" In a word, the question is whether that ownership can be transferred from individual capitalists or Joint Stock Companies to voluntary Associations of Workmen; the capital being obtained through the accumulation of savings in the Stores.

One of the most remarkable facts which we have learned of late years is the power of the working classes to accumulate capital, through the form of Co-operation just described. With it, the English and Scottish Wholesale Societies—Federated Bodies created by the Stores—have carried on immense operations and achieved extraordinary results. Receiving thousands of little rivulets, the savings of thousands of members, they have dealt with great funds with which to purchase articles of consumption through their own agents, in all the countries of the world. With those savings they have built splendid warehouses and manufactories; they have become traders, shippers, and ship-owners. Yet, even thus, there has not been an adequate field for the employment of the workmen's savings.

Capital therefore exists in abundance, and all else that the workers need they have: Labour, experience, and capacity; and also that most important requisite, a market for their products. Naturally and necessarily, however, these elements of successful production could not be obtained at once, or in a sufficient quantity. The difficulties, the obstacles, were naturally great at starting. If it is true that even in the ordinary business world, one-half of new undertakings fail within the first five years, how could there be otherwise than failures in an untried form of industry.

Nevertheless, there is among united workers, such a spirit of enthusiasm, such a hope of deliverance from the evils of the past, that success was only a question of time. There is, indeed, the admirable training in administration and economy, gained in the hundreds of Distributive Societies; while special technical and administrative ability can always be found, when adequately remunerated. Above all, in every Co-operative factory and workshop, the worker has a new and strong personal interest, productive of the strictest economy and of eager industry. In such undertakings, men labour with hope and pleasure; even when the work is disagreeable, or painful—whether it be that of the stoke-hole, the mine, or the furnace. The worker knows that he is no longer a mere wage-receiver, but an owner and a profit-sharer. As regards a market for his work, he has one ready to hand—viz., that provided by his brethren, the members of the Co-operative Store.

What wonder is it, then, that "The Labour Association for Promoting Co-operative Production, based on Co-partnership of the Worker," can report that the disasters and failures of the early days of experience and inadequate resources, have come to an end. They tells us that there are now no less than fifty Productive Societies based on some kind of Co-partnership principle. They have 11,000 members, and an annual trade of one million a year, with a percentage of profits large and steadily increasing, credited to the worker after paying living-wages, and under a system where "sweating" is abolished for ever.

Nevertheless, if Co-operative Industry is to realise the hopes of the Rochdale Pioneers, who said they "would reform the world," it must do far more than supply the Workmen's Stores. It must find its ultimate market among the public at large, and the question is, Can this be done? The leaders of this Movement quite believe it can. Either under the form of Co-operative Productive Societies, or in the form of Industrial Partnerships. It will be done. The last-named species of organisation is probably better fitted to meet the needs and the conditions of the more complicated and difficult industries. In the latter, "Captains of Industry," having already at their disposal the most perfect and expensive machinery, will more readily produce what is required than Societies of Workers finding the whole capital themselves. Provided always that all have a share in the capital, and of the management, it matters little which of the two modes of production is adopted. Great successes of both kinds have been achieved. Thus, in Leicester, the Boot Society, after paying five per cent. to its capitalist members (846 in number), has divided £5,200 in profits; of which forty per cent. went to workers, twelve per cent. to officers, and ten per cent. to the provident fund.

The Padlock Co-operative Society, of Walsall, which abolished sweating in that trade, and of course pays Trade Union prices, has won two-thirds of the total trade. The last report shows trade amounted to £14,000, yielding a profit of £1,029, of which £700 went to the workers, as bonus on labour, in addition to the interest paid on shares. On the other hand, we have the splendid triumph obtained by the Familistère at Guise, a partnership owing its creation to that workman of commanding genuis, André Godin, who has left behind him an imperishable fame. At his death the "Familistère" received a capital of £140,000; and the facts which two of its representatives MM. Bernardot and Froment, reported at this Festival last year, ought to be known throughout the world. For the nine hundred and eighty-six working members of this great Factory, there is no anxiety for the day of old age and weakness. While their average wages amount to 27/- per week, the interest on the Shares in which their profits are paid yields £31 a year; and the General

Pension Fund gives a further sum of £38. Thus, at fifty or sixty years of age, each man receives—on an average—a retiring allowance of seventy pounds per annum. Nor is this all: on this little territory of one hundred acres—which may be said to constitute a new industrial world—we find handsome dwellings, bright and healthy, occupied by nineteen hundred souls; we find Co-operative Stores, gardens,, theatre and concert-hall, schools and nurseries for infancy and youth. It should make men's hearts beat to think that what has been done at Guise may be done in hundreds, nay, thousands, of such Labour Settlements all over the world. Why not? Do not suppose that this famous experiment, or that equally famous one of the Maison Leclaire at Paris, owed their existence to men and circumstances so exceptional that they cannot be considered as a precedent or example. There are more than a hundred Industrial Partnerships in France, and our two friends above-mentioned represented no less than forty of them.

I just now referred to the necessity of finding a much larger market for the products of Productive Societies and Partnerships than that provided by the Distributive Stores. If the industry of the nation at large is to be ultimately transformed as we desire, this is a matter of paramount importance. Let me therefore call your attention to the fact that the Producing Societies of Great Britain, as of the Continent, are anxious and ready to enter that general market, and supply the whole body of consumers. As a step to this great end, a Depôt for the sale of the numerous articles now produced in this country has been opened at 36, Hart Street, Bloomsbury, and I earnestly plead for the practical support of the public, on behalf of the Producing Societies and Partnerships, by the purchase of goods at this Depôt. A great and increasing sale of Co-operative goods in the Metropolis would naturally afford a new and important source of prosperity to this Industry. The workers engaged in it only ask a fair trial, and no favour. Until Co-operators or Co-partners show that they can do more than supply Workmen's Stores, our friends, the Socialists, will continue to say: "You are insufficient for the "ideal. You can only supply a limited class of the community. "You cannot supply the whole. Your theory of Self-help, as "opposed to our theory of State-help, is inadequate."

It is, then, of the utmost importance that the Co-operators should show that they can accomplish the aim which they and the Socialists have in common. The methods of these groups of Social Reformers are essentially different; while both desire an entire change in the conditions of Industry and in the position of workers, Socialism demands that the State shall find the capital required for Co-operative workshops. The Co-operators, on the other hand, hold that the people themselves can obtain the needed resources. Both have the same end: the more equitable distribution of wealth, and to place the advantages of civilised life within the reach of all. Both condemn competition and strife as a source of moral and

economic weakness; both demand the union of Capital, Labour, and Land; both desire, not only more wealth, but better men. In this friendly controversy, let us not forget the great advantages of voluntary over compulsory association in developing the fullest activity and intelligence of the individual worker, in giving him a powerful incentive to improvement with joy and satisfaction in his work. Whether we rely on the free play of voluntary Association, or on the organisation of the workers by the State, through national or municipal forces, depends ultimately on the conclusions reached by the thinkers and workers of England at this time. Through innumerable meetings, through congresses, conferences, and discussions, it must be decided whether the one system or the other shall prevail, but the nature of that decision is momentous, and must greatly determine our Future.

Within the Co-operative world itself, there is a question of somewhat similar character; and the nature of its decisions must greatly affect the ultimate results of these efforts to improve the position of the mass of the people. That question is, whether it is better that the great Wholesale Societies of Great Britain should undertake all the Productive work which has to be done for the Stores, or whether that work should be left, in great measure, to independent Industrial Associations, in the form of Co-operative Societies, or Industrial Partnerships. For the same reasons as those I have just indicated as a ground for preferring Self-help to State-help, let us hope that nothing may be done to check the growth of the independent Associations.

No such divergencies of opinion, however, as to the best means of reaching the great end in view, should produce disunion between reformers. In every school of social thought there is some truth. Let each then learn from all the others, and all the others from each. Co-operators, Trade Unionists, and Socialists must close their ranks. We must all recognise the doctrine of the true division of labour, and that every form of it is of value to the community, whether we be toilers in the mine, weavers at the loom, tillers of the ground, discoverers, inventors, thinkers, teachers, statesmen, or philosophers.

The magnitude of the task is so great that all who perceive the cruelty and injustice of the present condition of society, are bound to labour for a better Future. Error, passion, ignorance may be forgiven; but apathy, indifference, and indolence cannot be forgiven. He who comes into such a Society as ours in this Nineteenth Century, and enjoys the results of the efforts of hundreds of past generations, has no moral right to them if he does not contribute some share, by thought or speech, or act, to the progress of the race. We call upon you, therefore, on the occasion of this Festival of Labour; we call upon you, men and women alike, to investigate the claims of this great Social Reform called "Co-operation," and to do what you can to realise the idea of "Heaven upon Earth." We have but to look

at the sublime lessons of Nature in order to learn how, in every portion of this Globe, both on the earth and under it, in every sentient creature, in every flower and tree, in the Vegetable as in the Animal Kingdom, there is marvellous provision for man's happiness and enjoyment. The Earth under our feet, and the Heavens above, bear hourly witness that Love has been the source of every fact in Nature. If, then, there is misery, suffering, and wrong among men, it must come from them, and from their ignorance and selfishness. It is for them to obey the eternal laws of Right, to fulfil the designs of the Creator, to bring among men, and in human institutions, the same harmony, the same beneficence, the same joy and progress, which it was clearly the design of the Creator to give to all His creatures.

Therefore let us enter upon the battle for the Right, each and all of us, assured of success, because assured of this truth—that we are the agents and servants of the Eternal. Inspired by this conviction, we shall overcome all difficulties and obstacles in our efforts to establish the rule of justice and goodness among mankind.

"Like mists before the growing light,
The hostile cohorts melt away,
Our frowning foemen of the night,
Are brothers at the dawn of day."

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The Labour Association will also send Reports and Balance Sheets of various Societies. "Employer and Employed" (Boston, U.S.A., Quarterly), and the National Co-operative Festival Annual Report.

If you are interested, write to the Secretary—

9, JOHN STREET, ADELPHI,

LONDON, W.C.

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LABOUR ASSOCIATION

FOR

Promoting Co-operative Production based on Co-partnership of the Workers

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WE earnestly ask the reader's attention to the important work which is being done by the Labour Association.

The work we set ourselves to do is not so much to raise our working people, as to help them to raise themselves. We think this is more effectual than alms-giving, and as hopeful as any movement of our time.

Our Annual Reports show how much has been already accomplished, and how much is still being done with very limited means.

We urgently need increased help, both in work and subscriptions, and we feel some confidence in asking for it under the special circumstances of our Association.

Our Committee, and all our Officers, with one exception, are unpaid, giving both their time and money to the work, although many of them are working men, to whom both time and money are of consequence.

We give no subsidies, but use all our funds for educational propagandist work, or in helping young societies to organise their working arrangements, frame their rules, and open and keep proper accounts.

We respectfully invite all friends of social progress to become subscribers to the Association, and to assist in the extension of its work.

THE EXECUTIVE.

END OF
TITLE